

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY

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FOR TTBT/PNE DEL

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PARM, US, UR

SUBJECT: ARTICLE ON PNES

1. FOR YOUR INFO, FEB 15 WASHINGTON POST CARRIES MOSCOW
ARTICLE BY PETER OSNOS, TEXT FOLLOWS:

2. BEGIN TEXT. THE SOVIET-AMERICAN PACT TO LIMIT UNDER-
GROUND NUCLEAR TESTS THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO TAKE EFFECT ON
MARCH 31 WILL NOW ALMOST CERTAINLY BE PUT OFF BECAUSE
ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE TREATY STILL ARE BEING NEGOTIATED.

TALKS HAVE BEEN UNDER WAY QUIETLY HERE FOR MORE THAN A
YEAR, BUT EVEN IF THE REMAINING ISSUES CAN BE WORKED OUT
QUICKLY, INFORMED U.S. SOURCES BELIEVE IT WOULD BE
PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO COMPLETE SENATE HEARINGS AND
THE RATIFICATION VOTE IN TIME FOR THE DEADLINE.

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UNLESS WASHINGTON AND MOSCOW AGREE TO EXTEND THE DATE FOR

THE TREATY TO COME INTO FORCE, THE PACT COULD COLLAPSE ALTOGETHER.

THE PACT ON UNDERGROUND NUCLEAR TESTING WAS SIGNED BY SOVIET LEADER LEONID BREZHNEV AND PRESIDENT NIXON IN MOSCOW ON JULY 3, 1974, A FEW WEEKS BEFORE NIXON RESIGNED. THE AGREEMENT WAS TO STOP TESTS OF WEAPONS OVER 150 KILOTONS. HOWEVER, AT SOVIET INSISTENCE, THE MATTER OF "PEACEFUL" EXPLOSIONS WAS LEFT FOR FUTURE NEGOTIATION.

THE LONG PERIOD PROVIDED BEFORE THE DOCUMENT TOOK EFFECT WAS TO ALLOW BOTH SIDES TO COMPLETE TESTING PROGRAMS AND TO WORK OUT DETAILS OF VERIFICATION--FOR EXAMPLE, HOW TO DETERMINE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WEAPONS TESTING AND PEACEFUL EXPLOSIONS.

THE TREATY, HOWEVER, WAS WIDELY CRITICIZED BY ARMS CONTROL SPECIALISTS IN THE UNITED STATES, WHO SAID ITS LIMITS WERE SO HIGH AS TO BE MEANINGLESS AND THE LANGUAGE WAS SO LOOSE THAT ANY NUCLEAR TESTING COULD BE JUSTIFIED BY MERELY TERMING IT "NONMILITARY." THE FEDERATION OF AMERICAN SCIENTISTS CALLED THE BAN "A COUNTERPRODUCTIVE SHAM."

RECOGNIZING THAT THE AGREEMENT HAD NO CHANCE OF RATIFICATION BY THE SENATE UNLESS THE OBJECTIONS WERE MET, THE FORD ADMINISTRATION, WITHOUT ACTUALLY SAYING SO, BASICALLY SCRAPPED THE TERMS OF THE NIXON-BREZHNEV PACT AND STARTED OVER IN TALKS THAT BEGAN IN MOSCOW IN THE FALL OF 1974.

THE PRECISE NATURE OF THOSE NEGOTIATIONS, WHICH ARE BEING LED ON THE U.S. SIDE BY AMBASSADOR WALTER J. STOESSEL, HAVE NEVER BEEN DISCLOSED PUBLICLY. BROADLY, WASHINGTON IS KNOWN TO BE PRESSING THE SOVIETS TO ACCEPT SOME RESTRICTIONS ON PEACEFUL EXPLOSIONS AND PERMIT ADEQUATE VERIFICATION PROCEDURES, INCLUDING ON-SITE INSPECTIONS OF TEST-SITES. THE LAST POINT IS AN OLD STUMBLING BLOCK IN SOVIET-AMERICAN DISARMAMENT TALKS.

THE SOVIETS HAVE LONG SAID THEY FAVOR A COMPLETE BAN ON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNDERGROUND NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING, BUT THEY EXCLUDE PEACEFUL BLASTS, WHICH MOSCOW BELIEVES CAN BE USEFUL FOR MASSIVE EXCAVATION PROJECTS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE SOVIETS WANT TO DIG AN ENORMOUS CANAL IN NORTHERN RUSSIA TO DIVERT WATER OF THE PECHORA RIVER FROM A NORTHWARD FLOW TO THE SOUTH, WHERE IT WOULD BENEFIT THE CASPIAN SEA.

A MAIN PROBLEM FOR THE U.S. IN BARGAINING WITH THE SOVIETS

ON THIS ISSUE IS THAT AMERICAN SCIENTISTS HAVE NO GREAT INTEREST IN UNDERTAKING SIMILAR PROJECTS.

THE PACE OF THE TALKS HERE HAS BEEN SLOW, ALTHOUGH SOURCES IN MOSCOW AND WASHINGTON DO REPORT PROGRESS. ONE HIGH-RANKING OFFICIAL SAID THE BARGAINING TEAMS "ARE NOT FAR FROM AGREEMENT" ON THE ISSUE OF PEACEFUL EXPLOSIONS. NEGOTIATING SESSIONS ARE NOW BEING HELD DAILY.

AS SIGNED BY BREZHNEV AND NIXON, THE TREATY WAS TO TAKE EFFECT ON MARCH 31, 1976, BUT IT ALSO CONTAINS THE LEGAL CAVEAT THAT IT IS "SUBJECT TO RATIFICATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURES" OF THE SIGNATORIES. TECHNICALLY, EXPERTS SAY, THE DOCUMENT COULD BE DECLARED NULL AND VOID ONCE THE DEADLINE PASSES, BUT IT SEEMS PROBABLE THAT SOME MEANS WILL BE FOUND TO AVOID THIS STEP.

ONE MAJOR SOVIET-AMERICAN AGREEMENT ALREADY HAS BEEN ABROGATED--THE 1972 TRADE AGREEMENT THAT WAS NULLIFIED OVER THE ISSUE OF LINKING BENEFITS TO EMIGRATION--AND NEITHER SIDE SEEMS ANXIOUS TO SEE A SIMILAR SITUATION DEVELOP AS LONG AS THERE IS A REAL CHANCE FOR EVENTUAL IMPLEMENTATION.

HOWEVER, SENIOR SOVIET SOURCES OFTEN COMPLAIN THAT THE UNITED STATES REPEATEDLY HAS SOUGHT TO MODIFY AGREEMENTS AFTER THEY HAVE ALREADY BEEN SIGNED BY TOP-LEVEL LEADERS TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF CONGRESS. POLITBURO IDEOLOGIST MIKHAIL SUSLOV RAISED THE SUBJECT PUBLICLY BEFORE A GROUP OF VISITING AMERICAN SENATORS LAST SUMMER.

THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP, HE SAID, HAD MOVED PROMPTLY TO APPROVE THE TREATY REACHED AT THE NIXON-BREZHNEV SUMMIT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WHILE THE UNITED STATES WAS DELAYING. IN FACT, AMERICAN SOURCES SAY, THE UNDERGROUND TESTING PACT NEVER HAS BEEN FORMALLY RATIFIED BY THE KREMLIN, BUT THE STATEMENT WAS NONETHELESS CONSIDERED SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE OF THE IRRITATION IT REFLECTED. END TEXT INGERSOLL

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